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Local High School Student Experiences Marine Science Firsthand at Woods Hole Science Aquarium

They came from diverse educational and family backgrounds, from states across the nation. For Katrina Malakhoff of Centerville, Mass., one of the 11 high school and college students who spent the summer working or volunteering at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium (WHSA), the nation's oldest public research display aquarium, it has been a team effort and a summer to remember.

Feeding the fish, training the harbor seals, cleaning tanks, leading shore-side collecting trips for the public, and helping children and adults learn about marine animals at the touch tanks have all been part of her daily routine. The WHSA offers two summer programs for high school students who have completed grade 10 or higher, a five-week internship and a two-week career seminar in late July. Both programs are run by the WHSA staff, and are projects of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and the neighboring Marine Biological Laboratory.

Malakhoff participated in the two-week Careers in Marine Science Seminar July 21 to August 1, along with four other high school students from California, Utah, New York and Massachusetts. Several seminar students, including Malakhoff, stayed on as interns for an additional 1-2 weeks after the programs officially ended to help with animal husbandry and to serve as junior naturalists on collecting walks.

The career seminar students get training in marine animal husbandry and basic aquarist chores, hear presentations from scientists working in a variety of marine fields, go on collecting trips, visit other Woods Hole science institutions, and go on field trips to the New Bedford and Nantucket. The seminar is designed to give students an idea of what people working in Woods Hole do and how different areas of science contribute to the larger effort to understand the marine world and to manage marine resources wisely.

Malakhoff is entering her junior year at Barnstable High School and plans to pursue a career in marine biology, something she became interested in when her sixth grade science teacher took her class on coastal field trips and conducted water sampling studies in local ponds.

Spending the summer learning about the marine environment was not new to Malakhoff, who has pursued a number of summer science opportunities in the past, from two summers in the Advanced Studies and Leadership Program at Massachusetts Maritime Academy to a Marine Science Consortium at Wallops Island, Virginia, where she conducted research on estuarine environments for a month last year. In the eighth grade she visited a rain forest in Ecuador.

She has worked part-time at Accu-line in Hyannis, which manufactures surgical marking pens, volunteers at the local library, participates in the Civil Air Patrol, and takes violin lessons. At Barnstable High School she plays on the field hockey team, is a member of the drama and history clubs, Future Problem Solving, and Cape & Islands Youth Congress.

Malakhoff plans to attend college and major in marine biology, and is thinking about a minor in Germanic languages. She also plans to attend graduate school in marine science, hoping to focus her career on oceanography and abyssal ecology.

She says the experience at WHSA this summer was “amazing. It was a great opportunity to learn about all the career possibilities in marine science, and to see how a research aquarium operates. And I definitely increased my knowledge of marine creatures and their habitats and the proper way to care for and protect these animals. I know a lot more now about the marine environment and the ways I can help protect and preserve it.”

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